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281134Z Dec 05

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 08 TEL AVIV 007079

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

11. Mideast

12. Iran: Nuclear Program

Key stories in the media:

All leading media, except The Jerusalem Post, led with the firing from Lebanon of at least four Katyusha rockets at Israeli communities -- particularly Kiryat Shmona -- late last night. Two houses were hit but there were no injuries. Israel Radio reported that the IAF struck a PFLP training base south of Beirut and cited a PFLP spokesman as saying that two of its members were wounded in the raid. The radio cited the IDF's belief that Palestinian groups in Lebanon are behind the attacks, and denials by Hizbulah, Fatah, and PFLP spokesmen in Lebanon of any responsibility for the rocket launchings.

The Jerusalem Post and Israel Radio reported that on Tuesday, State Department Spokesman J. Adam Ereli justified Israel's firing at the northern Gaza Strip areas from which rocket fire originated. Both media quoted Ereli as saying: "What we would like to see is effective measures against such acts so that the measures Israel is taking are not necessary." Ereli was also quoted as saying: "We see it [the Qassam rocket barrage] in the context of failure to address the security situation" by the Palestinians. The station reported that Ereli regretted the creation of buffer zones in the Gaza Strip. The Jerusalem Post quoted Ereli as saying that Maj. Gen Keith Dayton, the new U.S. security specialist in the region, arrived in the area for talks with Israeli and PA officials. Israel Radio reported that A/S David Welch is due to arrive in the region ahead of the Palestinian legislative elections.

The media reported that Qassam rockets were fired at Sderot on Tuesday. Ha'aretz reported that on Tuesday, the IAF fired missiles at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades offices in the northern Gaza Strip and attacked a bridge near the Gaza town of Beit Hanun in response to ongoing Qassam rocket fire. There were no injuries. Ha'aretz and other media cited the IDF as saying that the bridge had been used to reach the evacuated settlements of Elei Sinai, Dugit, and Nisanit and fire rockets toward Ashkelon. Today, Israel Radio reported that Israel has informed the PA that anyone entering the buffer zone after 6:00 P.M. is putting his life in danger. Hatzofe reported that on Tuesday, an 18-year-old Palestinian woman from Nablus, Nasrin Heshan, was injured when a bomb blew up in the city. The bomb was reportedly meant to explode near IDF forces. Hatzofe quoted Palestinian sources as saying that terrorists had planted dozens of bombs all over the old city of Nablus as part of their preparations in anticipation of an Israeli operation in the city.

All media (banner in The Jerusalem Post) quoted Mossad chief Meir Dagan, who testified before the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on Tuesday, as warning that Iran will not stop at making a single nuclear bomb. Dagan was quoted as saying that Iran will reach technological independence within a few months, after which producing a nuclear bomb will only be a matter of time.

Leading media reported that this morning, former Shin Bet head Avi Dichter formally announced at a press conference that he is entering politics and joining Kadima. The Ha'aretz web site quoted him as saying that he saw no possibility that Israel would be able to unilaterally set its borders with the Palestinians. He was quoted as saying that the Roadmap was the central plan that will affect Israel's future steps, but that "it seems that there is still a long way to go." Asked about the ramifications of the Gaza disengagement, Dichter, who the Ha'aretz web site writes has been widely credited with Israel's success in beating down terrorism., said: "The figures speak for themselves. The disengagement was followed by a sharp decline in the number of attacks." Asked if he had been promised a position in a future government, Dichter said he had not discussed the issue with Sharon. The media had speculated that Sharon could offer him the defense or internal security portfolio. Yediot reported that Kadima will distribute financial bonuses to activists who bring voters to the party.

Ha'aretz reported that Labor Party Chairman Amir Peretz's diplomatic team is formulating a platform calling for the long-term leasing of large West Bank settlement blocs from the Palestinians, adopting the model of Great Britain and China with regard to Hong Kong. The media also pointed to flaws in Peretz's electoral methods -- mostly his speaking solely about socio-economic issues, and also the fact that he spoke too pessimistically about Israel's future, and that he failed to keep former Labor Party Chairman Shimon Peres in the party, among other mistakes. The Jerusalem Post quoted Peretz advisers who counted those failings.

Ha'aretz quoted Datya Yitzhaki, a spokeswoman for the group Land of Israel Faithful, as saying that on Tuesday, hundreds of settler youths erected 14 illegal out posts in the West Bank as part of a campaign to show their strength after Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. Yitzhaki was quoted as saying that a total of 25 new outposts, all of which would eventually become permanent communities, would be standing by the end of the Hanukkah holiday (January 1). Yediot, Maariv, and Hatzofe also reported on this development. Maariv reported that on Tuesday, Amir Peretz criticized Sharon over the issue of illegal outposts.

Ha'aretz reported that Israel is seeking a solution that will permit East Jerusalem residents to vote in the elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council, but allow the government to adhere to its opposition to Hamas's participation in the ballot. The newspaper reported that Israel also wants a solution that will prevent the state from being accused of delaying the elections. Ha'aretz quoted PM Sharon as saying on Monday, in a meeting with Amir Peretz, that "an arrangement will be found." Ha'aretz wrote that Sharon refrained from elaborating.

Ha'aretz reported that on Tuesday, veterans of the Fatah party threatened to break away from the movement and from a competing list of candidates for upcoming elections, sparking a new crisis for PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas.

Ha'aretz reported that Likud Chairman MK Binyamin Netanyahu is trying to reach a "quiet understanding" with Moshe Feiglin, the leader of the party's far right faction Jewish Leadership, so that he withdraws his candidacy for the Likud's Knesset list.

Yediot reported that over the past few weeks, 1,000 olive trees in Palestinian villages have been uprooted, supposedly by settlers. The newspaper quoted Defense Minister as saying that if it is proven that Israelis are responsible for the phenomenon, the state will compensate the Palestinian farmers.

Leading media reported that the Education Ministry is lowering its English-language requirements for matriculation exams in order to increase the number of university students.

Summary:

Military correspondent Amir Rappaport wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "The fact that Israel is willing to live with a continuous drizzle of attacks in the south and the north is perceived in the Arab world as a sign of weakness, and only invites further attacks."

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "Israel is concerned -- and justifiably so -- about Hamas's participation in the PA elections, but imposing a ban on East Jerusalem's Arabs is not an appropriate response, because they must be allowed to exercise their right to vote."

Conservative columnist Yosef Harif wrote in Maariv: "It has been proven that with 'partners' such as the Palestinians, unilateral withdrawals constitute a recipe for the continuation of war, because not only do evacuated territories not bring peace closer, but they turn into launching areas for lethal Qassam rockets."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "The front-running Kadima Party of Prime Minister Sharon has a particular obligation to tell the citizenry its policy on E-1 and how it proposes to address Palestinian and international concerns over it. And those parties that oppose E-1 need to explain how they will nonetheless keep Jerusalem secure and vibrant and Ma'aleh Adumim accessible."

Columnist and outgoing Meretz Knesset Member Yossi Sarid wrote in Ha'aretz: "In America, it occasionally happens that mistakes are admitted, apologies are offered, and even such responsibility is accepted and conclusions are drawn. Not here."

Block Quotes:

I. "Because We Showed Restraint"

Military correspondent Amir Rappaport wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (December 28): "Israel, which responded with a great deal of restraint to a long list of attacks waged against it lately, has, by so doing, been sending a message of weakness.... Had the Israeli response to Hizbulah's attack in early December on a number of targets along the northern border been firm and aimed at targets in the general Beirut area, Katyusha rockets would probably not have landed last night in the heart of Kiryat Shmona. Had Israel broken the rules of the game and responded with real severity to the Qassam rocket fire out of the Gaza Strip -- and not made do with dropping leaflets, manufacturing sonic booms and deliberately shelling nothing -- the folks firing the Qassam rockets out of Gaza would probably have not dared continue to do so. The fact that Israel is willing to live with a continuous drizzle of attacks in the south and the north is perceived in the Arab world as a sign of weakness, and only invites further attacks. Israel has to reach the stage at which it makes good on its threats. Otherwise the IDF's power of deterrence will be completely eroded. Perhaps the time has arrived for Israel to take a proactive approach of checked escalation in order to put an end to the intolerable attacks on it."

II. "Let Them Vote"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (December 28): "Israel must let East Jerusalem's Arabs vote in the Palestinian Authority's legislative council (parliament) elections. That is not only because it undertook to do so in the Oslo Accords, but also because it does not want them as citizens of the state, and because it is the only way for the city's 250,000 Arabs to exercise their right to political expression.... There is no reason to change election arrangements in East Jerusalem. Israel is concerned -- and justifiably so -- about Hamas's participation in the PA elections, but imposing a ban on East Jerusalem's Arabs is not an appropriate response, because they must be allowed to exercise their right to vote."

III. "Unilateralism Is Doomed to Failure"

Conservative columnist Yosef Harif wrote in Maariv (December 28): "When the Prime Minister first exposed his unilateral withdrawal plan from Gush Katif and several northern West Bank settlements, he conveyed a double message: his step would strengthen security and bring peace closer. It appears that both messages were baseless. On Monday, Maariv published a version of

Kadima's diplomatic platform, in which [Sharon's party] commits itself to act in every possible way to promote the peace process and to lay the foundations for shaping Israel's final borders. Indeed, it's worthwhile to act in every possible way for the sake of peace, except one -- unilateralism. The lessons drawn from the disengagement from Gaza make necessary a cautious and meticulous approach, should the time come for discussions about the fate of Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank]. It has been proven that with 'partners' such as the Palestinians, unilateral withdrawals constitute a recipe for the continuation of war, because not only do evacuated territories not bring peace closer, but they turn into launching areas for lethal Qassam rockets."

IV. "Jerusalem's Dilemma"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (December 28): "Israel's urban planners have tended to stress short-term considerations at the expense of long term environmental and historical treasures. Now, Jerusalem is faced with a decision: whether to expand the capital's limits westward toward the forest and the [western] suburbs ... or eastward, over the Green Line, toward the settlement city of Ma'aleh Adumim.... American and European Union pressure has to date dissuaded a succession of Israeli governments, including that of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, from going ahead with linking Jerusalem to Ma'aleh Adumim. Opponents of E-1 argue that it would torpedo prospects for a viable Palestinian state by making it impossible for Palestinians to travel from Bethlehem to Ramallah. But surely a solution that allows Palestinians a north-south transit, while linking nearby Ma'aleh Adumim to Jerusalem, is hardly beyond the creative capabilities of diplomats and transportation planners.... The front-running Kadima Party of Prime Minister Sharon has a particular obligation to tell the citizenry its policy on E-1 and how it proposes to address Palestinian and international concerns over it. And those parties that oppose E-1 need to explain how they will nonetheless keep Jerusalem secure and vibrant and Ma'aleh Adumim accessible."

V. "At Least the U.S. Admits Its Mistakes"

Columnist and outgoing Meretz Knesset Member Yossi Sarid wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (December 28): "Despite the similarity between the Israeli and American intelligence communities, there is a difference, nevertheless: in America, it occasionally happens that mistakes are admitted, apologies are offered, and even such responsibility is accepted and conclusions are drawn. Not here. They drove an entire country crazy, they frayed its nerves, put it into a state of hysteria, complete with gas masks and masking tape, and no one bothered to apologize to us. [Former CIA Director George] Tenet left, and [senior Israeli defense official] Amos Gilad stayed, and continues to explain 'the situation' to us. Gilad is but one example among many. Will we be willing to buy a second evaluation from the same people who sold us the Iraq rattletrap?"

12. Iran: Nuclear Program:

Summary:

Ultra-Orthodox Hamodi'a editorialized: "Isolated American activity against Iran isn't enough."

Block Quotes:

"The Iranian Threat"

Ultra-Orthodox Hamodi'a editorialized (December 28): "Uniting forces in the international arena against the Iranian threat could greatly contribute to thwarting that crafty scheme. Iran still has something to lose from a union of the world's nations against it. Isolated American activity against Iran isn't enough. A European front must also be set up, because European states also stand to suffer if the Iranians reach nuclear capability.... Every possible effort should be applied on Russia so that it stops contributing from its experience and capability to the Iranian reactor."